

A survey conducted by the Chesapeake Bay Trust

# Marylanders and the Environment





## Dear Colleague,

The Chesapeake Bay Trust is pleased to share with you this timely report on public attitudes in Maryland about the environment and efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay. While we commissioned this study to inform our work as grant-makers supporting community-based environmental restoration and education initiatives across the state, we believe that our findings are an important resource for the broader environmental community and policy makers in Maryland.

Of particular concern to us was determining how significant a priority environmental stewardship is for average citizens across Maryland, both within their own households and in terms of public policy. We wanted to test the hypothesis that after years of lackluster progress the public may be succumbing to “Chesapeake Bay fatigue.” And we wanted to gain a better understanding of how the Trust can more fully engage citizens in the work of Bay recovery—both in terms of their willingness to make voluntary contributions through the Bay Plate and Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund income tax check-off programs and in terms of the targeting of our grant programs to ensure effectiveness and broad public support.

In the process, we have uncovered findings that are valuable beyond our own work, so we are issuing this public report. Contained here are the results of a scientific survey of more than 1,000 Marylanders, producing a vivid picture of the current environmental attitudes, practices, and priorities of average Marylanders.

We hope that you will find this report as useful as we do, and that together we can use this new information to advance the work of protecting the Bay, its tributaries, and all our natural resources here in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Allen Hance  
Executive Director  
Chesapeake Bay Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (“the Trust”) commissioned this public opinion survey of Marylanders to explore their attitudes and behaviors related to protecting the Bay and its tributaries. We measured citizens’ level of concern for protecting the environment generally, their assessment of the best role for the Trust consistent with its current programs and mission, and their reaction to several public policy questions. And we explored the public’s willingness to provide revenue to advance the Trust’s work through the purchase of Bay license plates and other means.

The Annapolis firm OpinionWorks interviewed 1,015 randomly selected Marylanders by telephone November 20–30, 2008. Respondents were not told that the survey was sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Trust or that it concerned environmental issues, so as not to bias their responses.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from this research:

- 1

As a basic value, Marylanders exhibit a strong concern for protecting the natural environment.
- 2

There is no sign of Chesapeake Bay fatigue. On the contrary, in large numbers the public is saying they are more interested in the health of the Bay and local waterways than they were a few years ago.
- 3

Marylanders believe that our waters can be returned to health, but they strongly believe government regulation is a necessary part of the solution, and that voluntary solutions alone will not do the job.
- 4

Though the public’s current economic stress is well known, clean water and Bay restoration are such high priorities in Maryland that a large majority would support increased public funding for those priorities.
- 5

Marylanders’ concern for the Bay is not driven by spending a great deal of time in direct contact with the water. In fact, relatively few Marylanders spend time boating, swimming, fishing, or crabbing in local waters.
- 6

The public intuitively sees the link between healthy waters and what happens on the land and wants a comprehensive solution to Bay restoration, even if they do not understand the concept of watersheds and the mechanics of storm drain systems.
- 7

The public wants the Trust’s grant-making to be locally relevant, returning money for meaningful projects in their home communities across the state. Expanding urban tree canopies, for example, are just as much of a goal for them as restoring sensitive buffers along waterways. Cleaning up local waters and making fish, crabs, and drinking water safe are very high priorities.
- 8

Environmental education for the state’s children is a leading priority for Marylanders. In several ways throughout the survey, citizens indicate that children should be prepared to understand the environmental challenges of the future. This concern is also reflected in a broad public support for investments in green jobs.
- 9

One out of 10 households in the state has at least one Bay plate on their personal vehicles. But knowing how the proceeds are spent convinces many more to consider purchasing the plate.

# Level of Concern for the Natural Environment

As a basic priority, “protection of the natural environment” ranks high for Marylanders. One in five (19%) place it “at the top ... if you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing Maryland today,” and another 29% rank it “above average.”

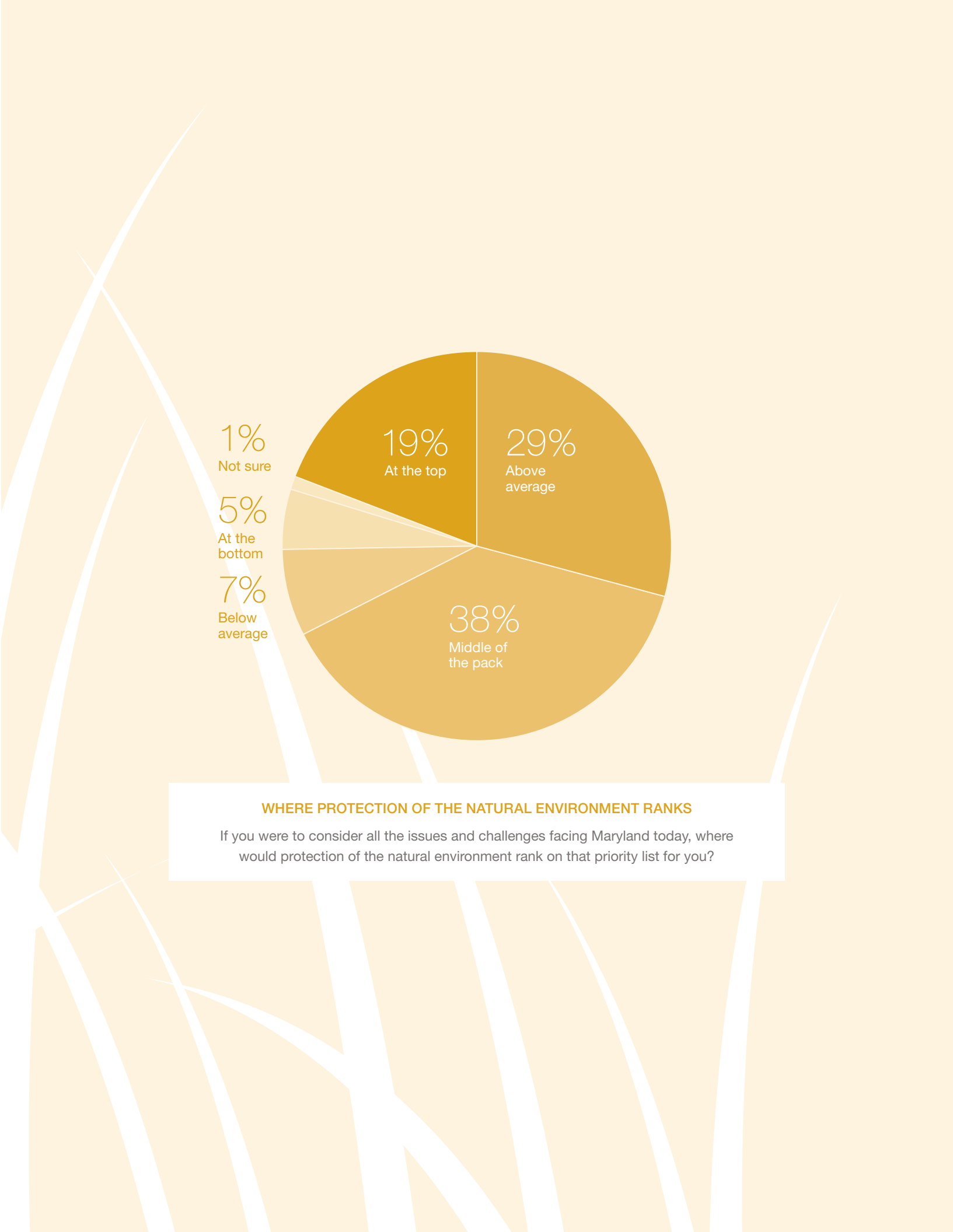
Looking deeper at Marylanders’ environmental values, we tested 13 specific priorities that relate directly to the Bay or to environmental protection more generally. Leading the list is “making sure our schools prepare children to understand future environmental challenges,” rated as “extremely” or “very important” by 85% of Marylanders. Almost four Marylanders in 10 (38%) rate environmental education as “extremely important.”

In that same top tier, and with nearly identical numbers, is “making sure the Chesapeake Bay is clean and healthy.” Clearly, this is a very strong endorsement by the public of continued focus on Bay restoration. Rounding out the top tier are “reducing air pollution” and “recycling and reducing the amount of waste you produce.”

In a strong second tier are several other priorities that the Trust supports through its programs and grant-making, including habitat protection, agricultural stewardship, community greening, restoration of sensitive areas, and restoring aquatic life.

Underlining their green affinity, Marylanders are half again as likely as adults nationally to say global warming is “extremely important” to them personally (24% vs. 16%), when comparing this survey to national numbers collected by ABC News just four months earlier.

Lower priorities on this list are slowing growth and development—which has perhaps receded from public view due to the slowing economy—purchasing green or locally made products, and reducing one’s own carbon footprint. In fact, there is ample evidence from our other work that the term “carbon footprint” and the concept it represents has barely penetrated the public consciousness despite its wide use within the environmental community.





SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES (ranked by importance)

How important are these issues to you personally?

	EXTREMELY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL
Making sure our schools prepare children to understand future environmental challenges	38%	47%	85%
Making the Chesapeake Bay clean and healthy	36%	50%	86%
Reducing air pollution	35%	49%	84%
Recycling and reducing the amount of waste you produce	32%	53%	85%
Protecting endangered species in Maryland	29%	45%	74%
Helping farmers become better stewards of the land	28%	50%	78%
Making neighborhoods and communities greener	25%	48%	73%
Restoring shorelines, wetlands, and other sensitive areas to their natural state	25%	47%	72%
Bringing back oysters, striped bass, and other aquatic species to their historic population levels	25%	43%	68%
Global warming, Maryland	24%	29%	53%
Global warming, U.S. ABC News/Planet Green/Stanford University, July 23–28, 2008	16%	30%	46%
Slowing down or stopping growth and development in Maryland	20%	34%	54%
Purchasing so-called “green” or locally made products	18%	42%	60%
Reducing your own carbon footprint	17%	40%	57%

No Chesapeake Bay Fatigue

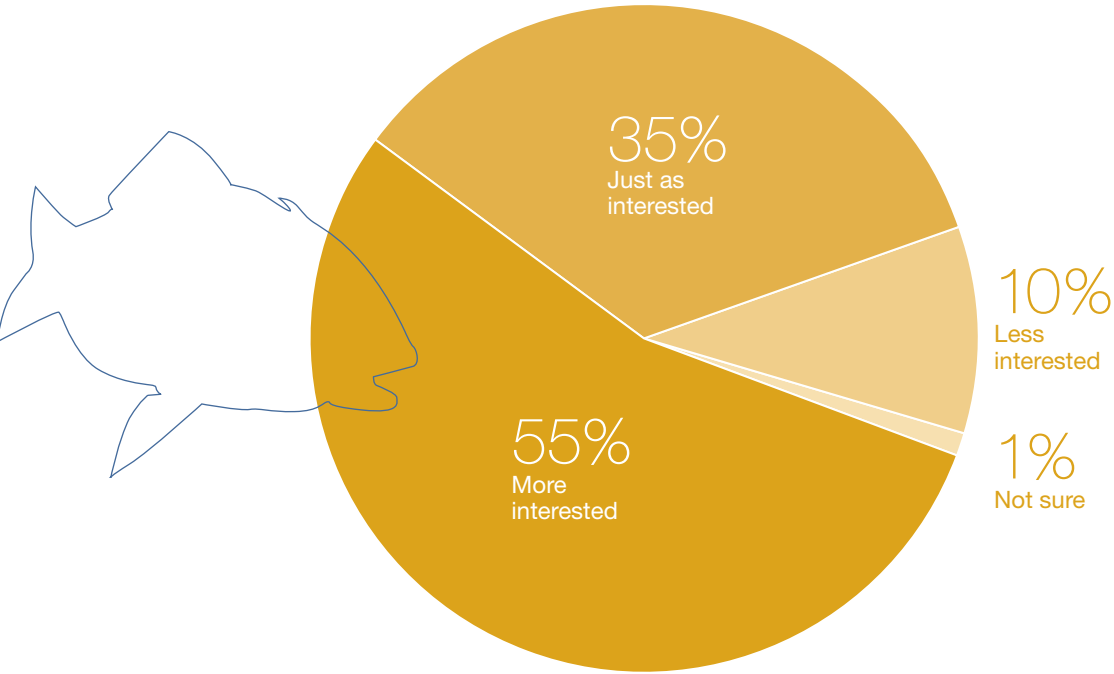
Not only do Marylanders rank restoration of the Bay and local rivers and streams extremely high on their list of environmental priorities, there is no sign in this survey that they are fatigued by the Bay or feeling hopeless about it.

Seventy-one percent of the public thinks “often” (34%) or “sometimes” (37%) about “the health of our local waters.”

More than half of Marylanders (55%) say they are “more interested ... in hearing about the health of the Chesapeake Bay” today compared to a few years ago. Only 10% say they are less interested. That is a net increase of interest in the Bay of 45%.

No doubt informed by the numerous local and Bay-wide report cards on water quality, Marylanders are strongly inclined to say the health of local streams, rivers, and the Bay is getting worse. Half the public (49%) sees conditions as getting worse, compared to only 14% who see water quality getting better.

Despite this fact, there remains a remarkably high level of confidence in our ability to solve this deep-seated environmental problem. **Nine out of 10 Marylanders (89%) still believe that “pollution in our local waters ... can be fixed.”**



INTEREST IN HEARING ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THE BAY  
TODAY COMPARED TO A FEW YEARS AGO

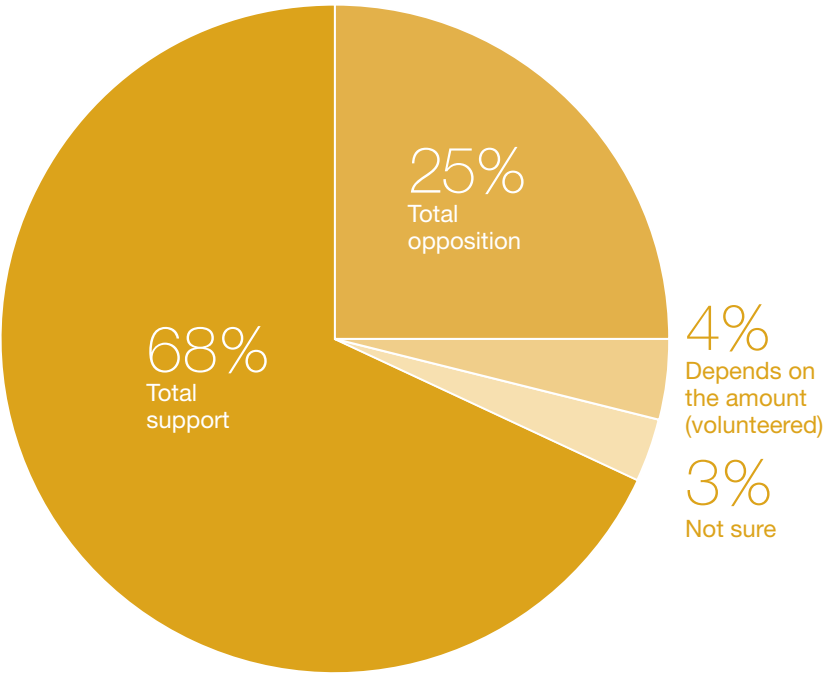
Compared to a few years ago, would you say you are more interested, less interested, or just as interested today in hearing about the health of the Chesapeake Bay?

# Implications for Public Policy

When it comes to addressing water quality, a large majority of Marylanders believe that the problem requires government regulation. Seventy-three percent say “the water pollution problem (is) so big that it will require some government regulation.” Only 21% are confident that water pollution is “the kind of problem that can be fixed with incentives and voluntary actions.”

It is well-known that the public is feeling economic stress, with three-quarters of Marylanders (72%) saying they worry about money, and 38% saying they worry about money every day. There is little appetite in the public generally for most initiatives at the state level that would require new taxes or spending. But as a sign of how much of a priority water quality is for Marylanders, two-thirds (68%) would support more public money going to solve water quality problems “if leaders in the state said more tax dollars would be needed.” Only 25% would oppose this increased spending. This is a powerful finding in light of the severe economic stress being experienced by many Marylanders.

Marylanders believe the state should foster green jobs, with 86% agreeing that “the state should invest more in training people for the green jobs of the future,” and 60% agreeing strongly.



### SUPPORT FOR NEW STATE SPENDING ON WATER QUALITY

If leaders in the state said more tax dollars would be needed to solve the problem, is that something you would be likely to support or oppose, if you thought the amount was reasonable?

# Marylanders’ Contact with the Natural Environment

Despite living in close proximity to the Bay, Marylanders have relatively little contact with the water. Only 11% frequently fish or crab, only 8% frequently go boating, and 8% frequently swim in natural waters (excluding the ocean).

While lacking these direct connections with water, Marylanders are considerably more likely to eat fish or seafood, with one-third (32%) doing so frequently. Beyond water, Marylanders are somewhat more likely to have outdoor experiences through gardening, hiking, biking, or bird watching.

An impressive number of Marylanders (62%) say they frequently encourage children to play outside.

Only 56% of Marylanders can remember taking a school field trip as a child that was focused on environmental education or experiencing the outdoors. But that number rises steadily the younger Marylanders are, from 32% of those over age 65 to 79% of those under age 25.

### MARYLANDERS’ CONTACT WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Please tell me how often you do any of these things.

	FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	TOTAL
Encourage children to play outside	62%	13%	75%
Eat fish or seafood out of the Bay or Maryland’s rivers	32%	33%	65%
Garden	35%	22%	57%
Hike	16%	22%	38%
Bike	13%	22%	35%
Go bird watching	15%	14%	29%
Fish or crab	11%	18%	29%
Go boating (all motorized and non-motorized types)	8%	18%	26%
Swim in any natural waters besides the ocean	8%	18%	26%
Hunt	5%	4%	9%

# Role of the Chesapeake Bay Trust

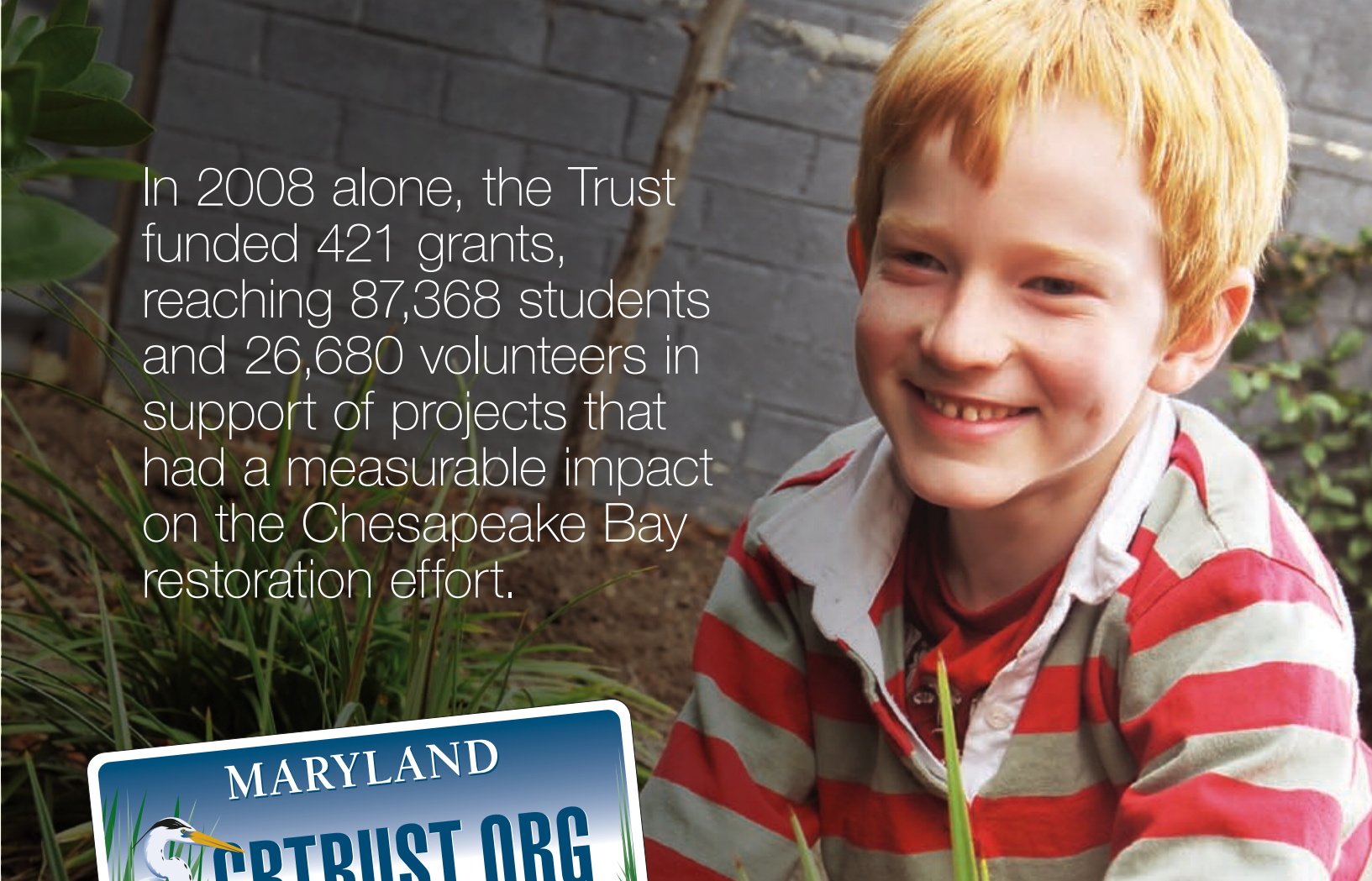
When presented with several possible uses of CBT grant money, the public wants grant-making that is directly relevant to their families and communities. Measured on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 meaning “a very good use of money” and 1 meaning “a waste of money,” Marylanders are most inclined to want grants that will make local waters “cleaner” and make fish, crabs, and drinking water “safer.”

Environmental education is the second leading priority. Significantly, “planting trees in our towns and cities” and “restoring native trees and plants along rivers and shoreline” both rank highly as well.

### PRIORITIES FOR CBT GRANT-MAKING (rated on a scale of 1 to 10)

I would like to read you some ways that the Trust might use its grant money in local communities like yours. Please rate each one on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 means it is a very good use of money, and 1 means it is a waste of money.

	OVERALL RATING (SCALE OF 1–10)	VERY GOOD USE OF MONEY (“10”)
Making our waters cleaner so local fish, crabs, and drinking water are safer	8.98	63%
Working with the schools to teach children about the outdoors and the environment	8.37	49%
Planting trees in our towns and cities and keeping them healthy	8.16	44%
Restoring native trees and plants along rivers and shoreline	8.08	42%
Giving people practical tips on how to live a more sustainable lifestyle	7.52	37%



## The Bay License Plate

**Ten percent of the households in the state have a Bay license plate on at least one of their vehicles.** By far, the leading reason people buy the plates is because “it helps pay for restoration of rivers and the Bay.” Secondly, people see the plate as a public relations tool that “makes others think about the environment.”

Knowing that the Bay plate fee “would go back to your local community” makes 30% of the public “very likely” to buy a Bay plate the next time they renew their registration. Reminding the public of the broad reach of Chesapeake Bay Trust grants to all corners of the state may be a strong impetus to increased plate sales.

Of those who do not have a Bay plate, 43% say it was not offered to them the last time they were purchasing or renewing their plates, suggesting that there is good potential for increased sales just through greater awareness at the point of sale.

## CONCLUSION

This survey of Marylanders' attitudes toward the environment and the health of the Chesapeake Bay confirms that the citizens of Maryland not only care deeply about the environment but support bold actions to create a greener and more sustainable future for the state. Even in hard economic times, protection of the environment is a priority and investments in environmental education, pollution prevention, and habitat restoration—whether through government programs or voluntary contributions to grant-making agencies such as the Trust—remain important priorities.

The public wants the Trust's grant-making to be locally relevant, returning money for meaningful projects in their home communities across the state. The Bay Plate and other voluntary donation programs including the income tax checkoff for the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund enjoy broad public support already—but also hold significant opportunity for increased public participation.





## HOW THIS SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

OpinionWorks interviewed 1,015 randomly selected adult residents of Maryland by telephone November 20–30, 2008, yielding a margin of sampling error of no more than  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level. This means that, if every adult citizen of Maryland had been interviewed, the true results would fall within that range at least 95% of the time.

Strict sampling quotas were established for seven regions of the state, and the final sample was weighted to accurately reflect the distribution of Maryland's adult population for key indicators including race/ethnicity, age, and educational attainment, according to the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

## ABOUT THE CHESAPEAKE BAY TRUST

The Chesapeake Bay Trust is a nonprofit, grant-making organization. Funding provided through the Chesapeake Bay Trust is sparking on-the-ground change in communities throughout Maryland and developing Bay stewards in classrooms across the state. Since its inception in 1985, the Trust has awarded more than \$27 million and engaged hundreds of thousands of Marylanders in projects that have had a measurable impact on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The Trust is supported by the sale of the Maryland Treasure the Chesapeake license plate, donations to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland State income tax form, and donations from individuals and corporations. Fully 90 percent of the Trust's expenditures are directed to Chesapeake Bay restoration and education programs.

**cbtrust.org**  
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## ABOUT OPINIONWORKS

OpinionWorks is a full-service opinion research organization based in Annapolis, Maryland. It was founded in 2001 to serve mission-driven organizations and public sector agencies. Nationally, OpinionWorks has conducted research for The Wilderness Society, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Lutheran World Relief, among others.

In the Mid-Atlantic region, OpinionWorks is the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun* and conducts research for the Maryland State Arts Council, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance, Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Washington's Metro system, and a host of others.

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